

## Saga Of The Coffee Machine

by Arachne

Category: White Wolf

Genre: Humor

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-29 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-29 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 17:54:30

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,539

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: A less than serious look at life on a Technocracy base.

## Saga Of The Coffee Machine

> <meta name="Generator"> A Day in the Life \*\*

Disclaimer: Mage: The Ascension and the Technocracy belong to White Wolf, not me, much as I might wish they did. I wrote this for fun, not to make any profit, and no copyright infringement is intended.

THE SAGA OF THE COFFEE MACHINE: Chapter 1 - A Day in the Life

\*\*\*\* \* \_

Got up,

Got out of bed,

Dragged a comb across my head.

Found my way downstairs and drank a cup,

Then looking up I noticed I was late.

Found my coat and grabbed my hat,

Made the bus in seconds flatâ€|

— — — — —

The Beatles, \_A Day In The Life\_

— —

I awake, twenty-four years and one day old, and feeling crap, being shaken gently yet firmly by a thin, strong hand on my shoulder. With a low groan, I brush the hand off and crawl back under the bedclothes, hoping to regain the merciful oblivion I was in only moments ago, hoping that my headache and the vile taste in my mouth are only a bad dream.

The bedclothes are abruptly torn away from me, and the hand latches onto my shoulder again.

"ZoÃ«, wake up. We've gotta be in the lab in half an hour, or the White Suit will freak."

That Brummie accent can only mean one thing. I force open my eyes and look into the face of my roommate, colleague and best friend, Manali Desai. She somehow manages to look rested, fresh and healthy, even though she drank just as much as I did. Why does the bloody woman never get hangovers?

Manali gives me an irritatingly chirpy grin. "Hot shower?" she suggests.

"Black coffee," I counter. My voice is harsh, rasping, dragged from somewhere deep in my larynx.

Manali shakes her head. The streaks in her neat black bob are purple this month, but already fading.

"None of the machines will give me anything but decaff, and I'm not touching that stuff after one of Susanna's Progenitor friends told me what they put in it. I think Mr Smith decided we're crazy enough without artificial stimulation. Especially after last night."

"Last night?" I rasp. My birthday. We dug into our secret stash of vodka and thenâ€¦ My mind is a fuzzy black haze. Mostly full of pain. There aren't enough adjectives for this kind of pain.

"I'll tell you when you're feeling stronger, okay? Just let's say â€"you'd better steer clear of the N.W.O for a while."

"What?" Horror penetrates through the pain and self-pity.

"Just go and get your shower and get dressed. Unless you're planning on turning up to the lab in your nightie. I'll go and find you some breakfast."

I stagger out of bed, grab my glasses and point myself at the bathroom door. I hate hangovers. Everything's such an effort of bloody will. I shuffle across the room, close the bathroom door and plunge into a hot shower.

Most of the low-ranking Technocrats on the Base end up in huge communal dormitories, but Manali and I only have to share one set of quarters between us, even though the bathroom is basically a Portaloo with delusions of grandeur. Don't think this is a mark of respect or anything. They keep us together to stop us corrupting/annoying/freaking out the N.W.O. personnel. We're the only representatives of our Convention here, and we've got ourselves a reputation for being strange. Even stranger than the rest of our Convention.

I emerge from the shower feeling more like a human being and less like something out of Night of the Living Dead. The Technocracy party line is that complementary medicine is a load of Tradition reality-deviant mumbo-jumbo, but Manali's auntie's Ayurvedic herbal soap does work wonders for hangovers. Having scrubbed the vile gunk off my teeth, I swiftly exit the bathroom wrapped in a towel.

Manali jumps to her feet. She's already fully dressed in our Convention's standard issue jumpsuit. I know, because she spends enough time whinging about it, that she'd rather slop about in her old jeans and a Radiohead T-shirt, but we are supposed to at least try to convince the N.W.O. that we're good little Technocrats. Even though, in our case, it doesn't noticeably work.

"I couldn't do black coffee, but Susanna gave me this," she says, and hands me a plastic cup.

I take a mouthful. Some sort of protein drink. Pineapple flavoured. Not unpleasant. I keep drinking as I dress. Orange ionic cloth jumpsuit over a new T-shirt patterned in splotches of black and white that proclaims MAD COW in large yellow letters.

"The Progenitors'll take that personally," Manali warns me, pointing at my T-shirt.

"Sod the Progenitors," I growl. Scoring points off the other Conventions is all that keeps me going. Except the prospect of getting transferred off this damn place and into an amalgam of fellow Void Engineers, where I can wear my beloved Doc Martens if I want, sing duets with Manali in the lab without getting glared at by Iterators, bugger off to the Spy's Demise of an evening, and do some real science. Void Engineers are meant to be Out There, boldly splitting infinitives that no one has split before, style of thingâ€| not stuck in a bloody N.W.O. Darkside Moonbase repairing spy satellites. It does things to your mind after a while. Especially since the only male company there is on this bloody Construct is Men in Various Monochrome Shades, middle-aged Progenitors and Iterators. I'm reaching the point where HIT Marks are starting to look good to me. It's really worrying.

Manali casts a quick, apprehensive glance at her chronometer. "Ten minutes," she mutters darkly, "and then our careers are in shreds. Especially considering last night."

Try as I might, I can't actually recall anything that either of us did last night. My lips and throat are still burning from drinking â€| something, and there's a traffic cone on my bedside table. Where the hell did I get a traffic cone on the Moon?

As I pull my bedclothes straight, a pair of mirrorshades falls out of the tangled heap onto the floor. I pick them up and stare at them. Really horrible conjectures start sliding through my brain.

Manali follows my horrified stare. "Well, it was the closest thing you could find to a policeman's helmetâ€|"

Total relief. "Ah. So I didn'tâ€|"

"With a Man in Black? Don't be stupid. Nobody could get that drunk,

not even you."

I decide to ignore the slur on my character. "But what about the traffic cone?"

Manali regards me critically. "You really don't remember? You must've been well and truly off your face. I'll explain it all later. Right now, we have five minutes to get to the lab before they give us to the Progenitors for medical experiments."

As one neurotic young scientist, we rush out of the door, pausing only to set the pathetic electronic lock. If serious people in mirrorshades really want to search the room, they will, but we can at least \_try\_ to discourage them.

The next few minutes are taken up by charging madly through what feels like miles of corridors, Manali staring at her chronometer and yelling increasingly frenzied time checks.

We round the corner by the Syndicate offices as Manali shouts "One minute!"

There are two Men in Black walking down the corridor towards us. The nearer one starts back in shock as we charge towards him. Obviously new to Darkside Base. His hand keeps going for his gun and then dropping away, as part of his brain is screaming "Reality deviants! Shoot them!" and the other half is going, "No, wait, they're wearing the jumpsuits and everything, they must be Technocrats!"

The other one has flattened himself against the wall with an expression of blind panic. He's not wearing the usual mirrorshades, and he's quite young really - about twenty physically, I'd say, although for a clone that probably means about two years old chronologically " and rather good looking for a Man in Black" There's something vaguely familiar about him as well.

Manali screams "Thirty seconds!" as we round the next corner. The lab door is just visible in the distance. We put on a final burst of speed.

As we near the door, Manali yells "Ten-nine-eight!" I press my palm to the sensor on the door. Manali is now muttering "Five-four-three!" A green light flashes up on the door panel, and we burst through at 0900 hours precisely.

We collapse over our respective desks, making "phew" sorts of noises. Manali looks across and grins at me.

"Did you \_see\_ that Man in Black?"

"I've never seen an N.W.O. operative look quite so thoroughly freaked out before."

"Oh, he'll get used to us. He'll have to!"

"What about the young one, without the mirrorshades? I'm sure he looked familiar."

Manali leans out over her desk. "He bloody well should do. Last night, you followed him around for half an hour singing "You Can

Leave Your Hat On" at him. And then you stole his sunglasses."

I am frozen with shock by this revelation. "I \_what\_? I must've been well and truly off my sodding face!"

Manali shrugs calmly. "Noâ€¦ that came later."

"\_Later?!?\_"

There is a discreet little knock on the door. I slump in a flustered heap over my desk as Manali walks over to answer it. Please God, don't let it be the N.W.O. I've had enough horrible shocks this morning as it is.

The door slides open to reveal the lab-coated form of Dr Susanna Jacobson, our one sort of ally on the Base, a broad grin on her face.

"Great party, girls!" she smirks as she sweeps into the lab.

"Oh yes?" says Manali warily.

"Definitely. Best fun I've had since I was transferred here." She thinks about this remark for a second, then adds "In fact, it was the \_only\_ fun I've had since I transferred here."

"Careful," warns Manali. "Don't go using the f-word in front of N.W.O. personnel. Technocrats have been sent to MECHA for less."

"Speaking of whichâ€¦" Susanna leaves one of her significant pauses.

I lift my head from my desk. "Go on. What?"

Susanna looks coy. "I have reason to believe that Mr Smith intends to interview you two. About last night."

"Oh God. This is about that Man in Black's mirrorshades, isn't it?"

Susanna takes a keen interest in her fingernails. "Harassment of N.W.O. personnel is one of the matters involved, but I think he's really interested in the motorwayâ€¦"

"\_MOTORWAY\_?" I shriek. So much for people breaking things to me gently. Manali is just hunched guiltily in the corner, with an expression that puts me in mind of a spaniel caught chewing up its master's favourite slippers.

Susanna blithely carries on. "And something aboutâ€¦ one of the Iterators being riveted by you? How \_did\_ \_you\_ two manage that? I didn't think Iterators could be riveted by anything that didn't come in binary codeâ€¦"

"Um, no, Susannaâ€¦" Manali manages weakly. "He wasn't riveted \_by\_ \_usâ€¦ he was \_riveted\_ \_by\_ us. Actually literally riveted. His cybernetic arm was. Riveted. To the conference table."

I have to hand it to Susanna, she takes this news with only a raised

eyebrow. "I \_seeâ€|\_"

"So what are we going to \_do\_?" I leap up from my desk.

"Sing \_Abide With Me\_?" suggests Susanna.

"Be serious. We've got to come up with some sort of defence."

"Of course. Very important, a good defence. Just ask O.J. Simpson."

Manali returns from her private world of guilt. "ZoÃ« can't defend herself, she doesn't even remember what happened last night."

"Good point. Can you get me some memory drugs, Susanna?"

Susanna looks dubious. " If ignorance is blissâ€|"

"There'd be no point having a Technocracy. I need memories, Susanna. I need to know what I did last night."

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*Name: \*\* Black Suit Operative #AT5932, "Nikolai"

\*\*Equipment ident number:\*\* 0246\AX7

\*\*\*\*

\*\*Equipment description: \*\*Standard issue Black Suit sunglasses

\*\*Reason for issue: \*\* Replacement

\*\*

If "Replacement" give reason for replacement of previously issued item:

\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*

Stolen by a drunken Void Engineer

\*\*

If previously issued item lost in action, give details of the incident:

\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*

Agent accosted by Void Engineer operative "ZoÃ« Tisdall" at 0026 hours on the Luna Darkside Construct. "Tisdall" apparently under the influence of large quantities of alcohol. Stalked for 37 minutes 14 seconds by "Tisdall", who was singing something sexually suggestive, with gestures. Attempted to lose "Tisdall" in the maintenance ducts. Apparently successful. Upon emerging from the ducts, attacked from behind by an unseen (believed camouflaged) assailant, who removed equipment item 0246\AX7 and ran away giggling. Voice recognition allowed identification of assailant as "Tisdall".

Intelligence Analyst Christine Coombs is trying to keep a straight face. "So that's your requisitions form, is it? Nikolai, if you hand this in, you run a severe risk of having it copied and e-mailed to every N.W.O. operative on Darkside Base at Christmas!"

I draw myself up straight. I don't see any humour in the situation. Naturals, even fellow N.W.O. operatives, often puzzle me. This is the first time that I have had to speak directly to the Intelligence Analyst, but I expected her to be less frivolous.

"Apart from anything else, you shouldn't have been fraternising with Void Engineers, anyway."

This is unfair. "I wasn't fraternising, I was being stalked!"

Coombs runs a hand through her already dishevelled hair. "Just pray Mr Smith sees it that way!"

"Mr Smith knows about this incident?" This is my first assignment after basic training. If my soundness as a Technocracy operative is already in doubt!

Coombs gives me a look that basic behavioural psychology training allows me to interpret as "Patronising".

"Of course Mr Smith knows. He's the White Suit with the extensive intelligence network at his disposal, and therefore knows everything that goes on on the Base."

She allows herself a small smile. "And there's also the fact that I e-mailed him this morning and told him the full horrible details of what the Void Engineers got up to last night."

I remain impassive. Tisdall's conduct seems to me more suited to a Cultist of Ecstasy or some similar form of reality deviant, rather than a trained Technocrat. She is probably being investigated for Tradition sympathies as we speak, or even signs of Marauder contamination. Astonishingly, Coombs seems to find the whole situation amusing rather than worrying.

She returns her attention to the requisition form. "Anyway, Nikolai, you can't hand this in."

"Because it's too likely to provoke amusement?" I ask sceptically. I don't believe that N.W.O. agents could be guilty of such un-Technocratic conduct.

"Because your mirrorshades were not lost in action and have not been destroyed. They are intact, functioning and retrievable, unless she's trodden on them in spacer's boots or drunkenly put them in the microwave or something."

She leans forwards across her desk and runs her fingers through her hair again. "Agent #AT5932, I cannot allow you to request a replacement in this case," she recites wearily. "You'll just have to corner Tisdall and ask for them back."

Some of the horror I feel at this idea must show on my face, despite all my training in use of expression and body language to project a suitably unflappable and authoritative image. Coombs affects not to

notice.

"You'll probably find her in the rec. room at about 1100 hours, sitting in the way of anyone trying to use the coffee machine with her boots on one of the chairs. If you can't find her immediately, just follow the noisy arguing about an utterly inane topic."

She leans back in her chair, obviously considering the subject closed. I shift awkwardly on my chair, trying to find words to explain the problems with this plan.

Coombs gives me a sharp look. "You can go now, Nikolai. I understand that R and D want to see you and #AT3378, about training you in the use of the Mark 7 Personal Manar Unit. I believe it's quite important too, as John Courage has walked off with the blueprints for the Mark 6, which means that every Virtual Adept out there will know how to jam it by Tuesday!"

This is something that has always puzzled me, from the first day I began to read up on N.W.O. history. "I thought John Courage was on our side."

"He is, when he wants to be."

"Then whose side is he really on?"

"His." Coombs pauses reflectively. "Lucky bastard."

I do not believe that this is the correct attitude for an N.W.O operative to take towards the matter. Void Engineers are practically reality deviants anyway, but if the rot has spread to my own Convention!

Coombs is now pointedly reaching for a pile of paperwork. "You can go now, Nikolai!"

Reluctantly, I stand and move for the door.

Coombs calls after me, "By the way, when you see Zoë, tell her to take those posters of hers down. We don't find the Men In Black poster in the rec. room funny, and Iteration X are even less amused by those Terminator posters. And if she hums that Will Smith song at us again, we will take retribution first and apologise to Tychoides later."

I nod numbly and leave the room. At least I will have two hours in R and D before I have to encounter Tisdall again. It may only be across the corridor from the Cosmology lab, but at least there will be two locked doors between her and me.

\*\*\*\*\*

"So what are we going to do?"

The three of us sit round the coffee table in the rec. room and consider our respective plights. Or, in my case, lack of same. Zoë and Manali are both staring moodily into cups of hot chocolate from my personal stash. I've never trusted the Base's dispensers, and have, instead, always trusted to a revolutionary piece of hypertechnology known as A Jar Of Hot Chocolate Powder And A Kettle.



Manali is the first to try to come up with an answer. "We need to replenish our idiosyncrasy credit. Fast."

I raise an eyebrow. "You need to replenish your \_what\_?"

"Idiosyncrasy credit. It's a theory of mineâ€|"

Ah. One of Manali's theories. This explains a lot.

"Idiosyncrasy credit is what you get by being Useful. You use your idiosyncrasy credit to pay for instances of being Weird. Thing is, " Manali looks down into her hot chocolate and sighs, "ZoÃ« and I were already well into the red before we came here. We're into idiosyncrasy overdraft now."

ZoÃ« winces. "Yeah, we used up our last bit of credit in The Great Insulting The Syndicate V.P.O. Debacle.."

I put up my hands. "I won't ask for details in case you tell me. So, to summarise, you two need to make yourselves useful in the desperate hope that this will lead Mr Smith to overlook your behaviour?"

"Well, if you put it like that, it sounds much harderâ€|" sighs Manali.

"Well, has anyone got a \_better\_ plan?" says ZoÃ«.

General looking round and raising of eyebrows leads to a consensus that no, nobody has a better plan.

"Okay," says ZoÃ«. "How can we be Useful?"

"\_I AM NOT INTERESTED!\_"\_

--

The Void Engineers look up curiously, just in time to see the wild-haired figure of Intelligence Analyst Christine Coombs elbow a seven-foot cyborg out of the way as she storms out.

Four eyebrows are raised in unison as they turn and look at me in futile expectation of an answer. There is a complicated three-way exchange of glances among the three of us, punctuated by bewildered shrugs and bemused expressions.

I decide to attempt to introduce words into the communication. "PMT?" I suggest brightly.

"Doubt it," says ZoÃ«. "More likely that the essential basic crapness of her life has just started to get to her. Look at her. She hasn't had any intelligence to analyse since 1997, she's still having a bad hair day that started six months ago, and she's the only person on this Construct that could organise a piss-up in a brewery so everyone expects her to sort everything out. No wonder she's going a little deranged."

"Actually, no," says Manali diffidently, "It's caffeine

withdrawal."

"It's \_what\_?" demands ZoÃ«.

"Caffeine withdrawal," repeats Manali. "Christine has one hell of a coffee habit. She gets through at least a dozen cups per day. So if she can't get a hit of coffee, she goes into withdrawal."

"But there's a perfectly good coffee machine over there," argues ZoÃ«, waving her mug vaguely toward the far corner of the room.

"Actually, no there isn't," explains Manali. "It's being temperamental. It's not giving people coffee."

ZoÃ« thinks about this for a moment. "It's \_never \_given people coffee," she protests. "It's given people some sort of vile dark brown chemical gunk that tastes almost but not quite entirely unlike coffee and \_claimed \_it was coffee, but it's never actually given anyone anything that's recognisably coffee."

"It's coffee, Jim, but not as we know it," I murmur. "Have you ever noticed," I continue blithely, ignoring the glares of my Void Engineer companions, "that everything you get out of that machine tastes of coffee, even the chicken soup, except the coffee?"

"\_Alleged\_ coffee," ZoÃ« corrects me. "That's probably because it does mixtures sometimes. Tomato soup and hot chocolate is one of its favourites. It's probably putting coffee where-"

"No coffee has gone before?" I suggest, deadpan.

ZoÃ« gives me a look that would be cutting on a less innately pleasant face. "You know, Susanna, you're almost funny."

"It's not doing mixtures now," says Manali, making a valiant attempt to bend the conversation to her purposes. "It's not doing anything."

ZoÃ« gives her friend a puzzled look. "But if it's not doing anything, what's the problem?"

"It's gone Minimalist. Ask it for a cup of coffee and you get," Manali pauses slightly for effect, "A cup. If you're lucky."

"And if you're unlucky?" ZoÃ« asks curiously.

"You get coffee. Just coffee. No cup. Only coffee. Dribbling away down the drip grille. Which is what happened to Christine. Which is why," Manali finishes triumphantly, "she's in such a vile mood!"

"It lurks, an' all," observes ZoÃ« irrelevantly. "I've never seen an inanimate object lurk so well. It just squats there in the corner of the room and looks like it's possessed by the Devil."

"Vampires, yes, werewolves, yes, Nephandi, yes, unusually subtle Marauders, yes, badly trained Men In Black, yes â€" they all lurk magnificently. Coffee machines, no, not up to now. I would never even have considered the possibility of being lurked at by a coffee

machine till I reached Darkside Base," I observe thoughtfully.

ZoÃ«'s eyes have gone wide behind her John Lennon glasses. "Waitamminuteâ€|"

It would appear that the necessities of self-preservation have overridden even the perennial fascination of gossip.

ZoÃ« leaps to her feet, throwing her arms akimbo. "\_MANALI YOU'RE A BLOODY GENIUS!\_"

There is a cry of panic from behind my chair. I turn just in time to see a rather young Man In Black take a balletic leap backwards and completely fail to clear the pool table.

There is a rather spectacular crash. I close my eyes. "Oh dear God, \_Nikolai\_â€|"

\*\*\*\*\*

We both spin around and stare in horrified fascination at the tangled heap. The young MIB from this morning, still mirrorshade-less, is sprawled across the fallen pool table, clean-cut features distorted in pain and horror.

"Oh, Nikolaiâ€|" sighs Susanna, getting up from her chair and walking over towards him. "Are you all right?"

The young MIB closes his eyes for a moment. "Substantial superficial bruising. Possible pulled or twisted muscles in ankle and shoulder. Shallow cut on left calfâ€| \_don't let her near me\_â€|"

I halt abruptly, halfway towards the MIB. The utter terror on his face astonishes me. I'm not that scary. Well, actually, I'm not scary at all.

"Nikolai, you have remembered to take your medication?" says Susanna crisply.

"Yes, Dr Jacobson, butâ€| that's \_Tisdall!\_"\_

--

I stand still in wonder. I've never been the object of a phobia before. Manali casts me a look and a raised eyebrow.

Susanna looks me up and down. "Yes," she agrees.

"Tisdall! Possible Tradition sympathiser! Suspected Marauder influence!"

My jaw drops. I cover my mouth to keep from giggling. Me, a Marauder? Manali doesn't seem to be amused, strangely enough.

Susanna shakes her head. "Okay, Nikolai, let's get you to sickbay." She helps the MIB to his feet and leads him off. "Good luck with your idiosyncrasy credit, girls."

Manali drives her hands into her hair. "Suspected Marauder influence?"

ZoÃ«, we're so far in the redâ€¦"

"I was gonna say we're far in the something else, but anywayâ€¦"

"So c'mon, what's your cunning plan, then?"

"Okay, well, you gave me the idea when you were talking about Christine. So I thought, right, we need Christine on our sideâ€¦" I throw in a dramatic pause here.

A slow grin spreads across Manali's face. "So we give her coffee!"

"Better yet, we can get the whole of Darkside Base on our sideâ€¦"

"By fixing the coffee machine!"

End  
file.